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ABSTRACT

This paper describes one business school's response to the challenges of globalization. After faculty members taught seminars in other countries, an interest was expressed in conducting international study seminars for the school's business students. One-week seminars were arranged, which allowed part-time, employed MBA students to enroll. The course was designed as a serious academic endeavor, including pre-trip lectures and post-trip discussions. The seminar itself involved presentations by experts from companies, agencies, and government. In planning the experience, faculty leaders are encouraged to develop checklists and focus on one country and several locations within that country. They are also encouraged to think out the seminar's purpose and plan in detail how to achieve that purpose. The model most frequently used involves traveling to a major city in the country, with a short trip to another city if possible. Participants meet with representatives of many business, finance, and government entities. The thrust of the seminar is first-hand discovery of knowledge and integration into the student's frame of reference. Two of the university's international study seminars have been designed to facilitate joint student projects, with university students and students from the host country focusing on the same topic. (SM)

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WHITHER THOU GOEST------THE INTRIGUE OF AN INTERNATIONAL STUDY SEMINAR

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We have become acutely aware that globalization has increased significantly in the corporate world. In addition, the world wide web has experienced major development. Now, we see the expansion of cross-national political alliances. Consequently, we who work in academic institutions have been presented with a challenge. How should we respond to all of these changes?

In this paper, we describe how one business school has responded. The school analyzed the situation in which it existed, took stock of the necessary changes, and formulated an appropriate plan of action. Our focus herein is one facet of the school's response: International Study Seminars.

THE LOCAL SCENE

DePaul University is located in Chicago, a major center of business and financial activity. Chicago is the home to a large number of Fortune 500 companies as well as financial institutions who have merged across regional lines and national borders. Our students take jobs in an environment which changes rapidly from year to year. The challenge to the business school and its faculty is immense! We must prepare our students for this ever changing and continually evolving environment if we are to serve our purpose well.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

The focal point of our activity, understandably, has been the faculty. Given that most of us skipped the international chapter during our own degree course work, how do we internationalize the faculty?

There are several alternatives available to every school ranging from dutifully listening to Dan Rather every night to actually living abroad as a Fulbright Scholar. DePaul's initial approach was to compete for U.S. government grants which made it possible for members of the faculty to teach seminars in other countries. This hands-on experience was of limited duration. However, it beat reading books/articles or listening to television because the selected faculty members had to encounter all the aspects of living in another country including eating from a different menu, navigating the public transportation system, experiencing a different culture, seeing a different political and, possibly, different economic system, and being exposed to students with different learning experiences. The overall experience was contagious. Those members of the faculty who taught the initial seminars won "bragging rights," and numerous colleagues, who had not had the experience, lined up for the next chance.

Eventually, members of the faculty who had an international experience expressed the desire to conduct international study seminars for their DePaul students. In that way, the faculty members who conducted the study seminar would increase their international exposure while the students would experience their initial international exposure. Since the school encouraged the use of two faculty members, the deputy leader would gain international exposure, often for the first time, while being groomed to conduct his/her own subsequent study seminar.

PLANNING THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY SEMINAR

Although adrenaline was pumping on the part of several faculty members, there was a leering fear that the administrative aspects of the seminar would eventually douse that flame of enthusiasm. Thus, the school had to make it possible for the faculty member to navigate the administrative maze without sinking or abandoning the whole idea.

One seemingly large obstacle was attracting students to take the international study seminar. This challenge was especially formidable since DePaul enrolls large numbers of part-time MBA students. A common perception was that part-time MBA students could not, and would not, leave their jobs in order to participate in an international experience. That perception was an error! By scheduling the seminars to run from 7 to 9 days, part-time MBA students were able to enroll. And, they did so enthusiastically! In many instances, the students' employers did not require the student to use vacation time for the seminar. In the majority of instances, the tuition was paid by the company as it would have been if the student had taken a class on a DePaul campus. If the location is attractive, in that it appears in the news frequently for reasons other than war or mayhem, and it is relevant to some aspect of business, students will be interested. If the faculty member who is leading the seminar has a good reputation among students, even more students will be interested.

Even more intimidating in the administrative maze is the budget for the course. Many members of the university central administration discuss these seminars with the sound of clanging cash registers ringing in their ears. The international study seminar, like the business school itself, is viewed as a cash cow. This notion needs to be dispelled quickly. As mentioned earlier, the raison d'etre for international study seminars in DePaul's business school has been the development of human resources. The faculty resource must be developed internationally if the university's business school is to remain vibrant, competitive, and successful. Short-run profit is not the desired focus---an investment in the faculty resource is the desired focus.

Another tricky choice in this maze is pricing: the matter of deciding what to charge for the international study seminar. DePaul charges the tuition that normally follows a course plus travel and accommodation costs. A small margin added to these items should cover the faculty stipend and expenses as well. By judiciously selecting a travel agent and/or airline, very competitive prices can be obtained for travel. A similar process can lead to good accommodation rates as well. In these instances, members of the school's advisory board and/or the university's board of trustees can be of assistance.

Pedagogical concerns are of critical importance in addition to the administrative ones. The employers of part-time MBA students are leery of international seminars in that they fear the seminars are nothing more than junkets in a cap and gown. Thus, the course structure and content need to be planned as a serious academic endeavor. When planning the seminar, a faculty member should blend lecture, small group projects/discussions, and structured presentations in such a way that the course evolves as a cohesive whole, adding to the students' academic experience. One way this can be accomplished is through the use of pre-trip lectures and post-trip discussions which book-end the projects that the students have been assigned prior to embarkation.

The pre-departure lectures set the stage and tone for the seminar. More importantly, it is the time to establish the expectations of the faculty member and the responsibilities of the student. It is at this point that the learning objectives of the seminar are articulated. More specifically, the faculty point out what students should observe, the need to maximize the benefits from the hosts' expertise/experience, and the details of the student projects.

Since a major portion of the seminar will entail presentations by experts from companies, agencies, and government, careful selection of the host organizations along with mindful matching of topics to be covered is of paramount importance. Because the exposure time is short and the concentration is dense, the host organizations should be chosen with an eye to their ability to capture the economic, political, societal, and cultural environment of the area visited. The time and effort should be expended to insure that specific topics are covered to give the course it requisite content and meet the designated learning objectives. Otherwise, the faculty member risks exposing the students to standard and canned presentations. By providing the students with the topics linked to the host organizations, students should be equipped to prepare thoughtful questions which result in insight and add dimension to the learning experience. These pedagogical items are further addressed in the Academics section.

READY, AIM, FIRE

Ready: Operational Issues

To insure that the international study seminar is a positive developmental experience for the faculty, a robust educational experience for the student, and a "good neighbor" experience for the host country, planning with a strong sense of detail is essential!

We encourage and help faculty leaders to develop and use check-lists. This creates an umbrella which generally protects the uninitiated faculty against pitfalls. A few of the items on the check-list would include:

- casting all major contracts and agreements in US dollars to protect against budget surprises due to currency shifts.
- using the travel agency that has executed other international study seminar trips.
- following and enforcing deadlines for initial deposits, payments, and enrollment in optional activities.
- providing all students with a check-list of requirements, passports, visas, inoculations, major prohibitions, and important cultural differences.
- talking with experienced international study seminar leaders who have traveled to the host country and seeking the advice of other experienced travelers.
- receiving approval from appropriate curricular, college, and university bodies.
- receiving written confirmations for transportation and lodging.
- notifying appropriate embassy or consulate offices.
- identifying who reimburses whom for what.
- detailed planning, detailed planning, and more detailed planning.

Aim: How to set it up.

An international study seminar generally begins with a faculty member expressing some interest in a particular region or country. At DePaul, the faculty member contacts the Richard Driehaus Center for International Business. One of the Center's responsibilities is to provide guidance, assistance, and administrative support in the implementation of international study seminars. Based on prior expressions of interest and a generous dose of reality, the potential seminar leader is encouraged to focus on a single country as well as two or three locations within that country. Additionally, the Center urges the faculty member to think out the seminar's purpose and to plan in detail how that purpose will be achieved. The theme of detailed planning, detailed planning, and more detailed planning is expressed in as many ways as possible. Using the university newspaper, business school student publications, local ethnic newspapers, e-mail lists of students, student advisors, and other vehicles, the faculty member develops a list of potential "travelers."

Armed with the list, an initial meeting is scheduled. DePaul requires 12 hours of pre-departure classtime, in-class study planning, pre-departure communication among DePaul students and/or overseas students, and general preparation/orientation.

Frequently, faculty leaders will schedule DePaul's corporate partners/ members from various boards or contacts as pre-departure speakers. These speakers range from nationals of the host country (working/studying in Chicago), US nationals who have been assigned to the host country, or senior management who have responsibility for a subsidiary/division in the host country. These presentations, and subsequent discussions, bring a sense of the 'here and now', a dimension of realism, and stimulate the audience's anticipation. Additionally, DePaul's Chicago location facilitates the scheduling of economics and/or cultural officials from the local consular office. These pre-departure presentations are very important in preparing students as well as building the students' commitment to the forthcoming departure. Imagination and creativity in implementing this initial phase provide dividends in subsequent phases of the seminar.

A specific example will help to alter the focus from the general to the specific and capture some of the flavor of the pre-departure phase. A recent seminar to Ireland featured an Irish cultural affairs officer, an Irish entrepreneur team, and a historian specialized in Irish history/politics during its initial three-hour meeting. Subsequently, time was allocated to three agenda. The group administrative agendum included "ground rules", telephone tree, establishment of a "buddy system", with whom do you want to room, and similar items. The academic agendum focused on learning objectives, the meaning of the trip, individual or group presentations/papers, and academic responsibilities and assessment. The final agendum involved articulating the expected outcomes including a healthy dose on cultural growth and perspective. The reading/research assignments were made in preparation for the last pre-departure meeting.

The last meeting included a film on Ireland, an Irish step dancer, and a review/discussion of reading assignments as well as a status report on the students' research efforts. The final itinerary was distributed, and the top ten travel tips were discussed including bromides such as: always carry a book, never leave without a soda/water, bring food snacks, expect rain, do not change money on Monday, bring three xeroxed copies of your passport and always leave one in your suitcase, carry your cards (ISIC, medical, credit/debit), do not forget any needed medication, and bring a change of clothing in a carry-on separate from the rest of your wardrobe.

Fire: The trip itself.

The DePaul ISS model that has been used most frequently consists of traveling to the major city in a country with a short visit to another city when time and transportation are available. The participants meet with representatives of service, retail, and manufacturing business, financial and financial service organizations, agencies, as well as local and central government. In this plan, the seminar will meet with 10 to 14 hosts. More specifically, our pattern is to visit several financial and financial services businesses: a large international bank, a branch of a US bank, and an investment house. Meeting with a major manufacturer head-quartered in the host country is very desirable. Being current and future consumers, the students always seem to relate to a large retailer as well as international marketers of glass/china/pottery. The Harbor authority, a city government department, and/or a department of the Central government frequently evolve into more interesting sessions that the students expected. Other venues, which can be sources of surprised interest, are meetings with departments from the opera, museums, and concert halls.

During this phase of the ISS, maintaining the schedule is probably the key to successful meetings. An essential component to staying "on time" is checking and rechecking the planned transportation-reserved, charter, or public. Another component of success is the availability of a contingency plan. Every seminar needs one or two contingency plans that the group can swing into when an unexpected cancellation or transportation failure occurs.

While it may seem trivial, most ISS leaders include time to shop in their ISS schedules. The leader can enhance the shopping by providing lists of where to go and what are considered "good buys." Preparation of such lists are easily done. Rather than building large blocks of time into the schedule, "shopping breaks" are a good contingency item when a scheduled visit is cancelled or greatly altered. Another quick fix is having the schedules of architectural and historical tours or cultural events. An additional possibility would be to organize a trip to the local university.

THE ACADEMIC

From an academic viewpoint, the thrust of the seminar is the first-hand discovery of knowledge and integration into the student's frame-of-reference. This knowledge resulting from learning is acquired through observation, participation in activities, and is very frequently in 'field-based' settings, lacking the structure of the classic classroom. This perception and observation based learning is supported by theory based information that the student brings to the seminar. The pedagogy can be characterized as learning-by-doing, a classic pedagogy with precedents in the professions.

At DePaul's College of Commerce, the academic requirements associated with international study seminars are similar but different. All of the international seminars require subsequent meetings of the participants as well as faculty assessment. The post-return class meetings provide time for an overview, opportunities for integration, comparison of learning objectives and achievements, as well as expressions of self-evaluation. The last could be possibly characterized as 'what am I taking forward' into my academic life. This occasion provides an excellent chance to gather feedback to improve subsequent seminars. The assessment does not stop at the level of verbal discussions. A paper of appropriate detail and complexity is required.

The difference among the College of Commerce's seminars lies in the design and execution of the written paper. In some cases, a single topic is chosen. For instance, all members of the seminar are to address: In light of Japan's economic and political environment, analyze its economic prospects for business opportunities? (Would you open a business in Japan?) In another approach, graduate students have been encouraged to continue their prior work, performed for their employer or for another course, now with a comparative focus. With increasing emphasis on team analysis, a recent seminar utilized teams of students with different functional interests. In that seminar, teams of students interested in finance, accounting, and marketing analyzed a major industry in the host country. Another and older approach has been to assess student papers on self-selected topics but with a connection to the culture of the host country.

For the business school student and the faculty leader, the international study seminar is a stimulating opportunity to see theory meet practice in a multinational context.

INNOVATION AND OTHER DIRECTIONS

More recently, two of our international study seminars have been designed to facilitate joint student projects. That is, DePaul students and students from a university in the host country focus on the same topic. In this model, there is a very narrow focus on one industry and one group of students integrating with host students on academic, professional, and personal levels. The trade-off in this model is depth versus breadth. More specifically, this model was utilized in a December, 2000 seminar to Argentina. The students at Universidad Del CEMA in Buenos Aires were working on a class project involving the analysis of the Argentine pharmaceutical industry. Oriented, to some degree, to the United States pharmaceutical industry (Baxter and Abbott Laboratories are located in the Chicago area) in the pre-departure phase, the theme for this seminar was the Argentine pharmaceutical industry. DePaul students spent their time visiting and listening to representatives of the host country's companies, attending university lectures, and in discussions with their university counterparts. The goal was to generate team papers by teams consisting of United States and Argentine students.

It seems early to judge the benefits to the students. From the faculty member's viewpoint, finding the cooperating faculty may be difficult. Interested DePaul faculty can take advantage of The Driehaus Center for International Business's partnerships with approximately 25 schools. However, the post-travel portion, attempting to coordinate and complete papers across borders and languages, is very difficult. In our case, the architecture of the paper was changed so that only DePaul students, in teams composed of the various areas of finance, marketing, finance, wrote the papers.

DePaul is also experimenting with another model whose design provides for intense exposure of its students to an "off-shore" peer group. In this design, a faculty member arranges to teach his/her course in a short, intense format at an "off-shore" site which has an existing DePaul MBA program. For instance, during our December, 2000 intercession, some DePaul MBA students traveled to Hong Kong where they joined employees of the International Bank of Asia for a graduate course in Marketing. The College of Commerce is beginning MBA programs in Bangkok and Bahrain in September, 2001. The College administration believes that this has strong potential as a vehicle to expose graduate students to another culture, provide an opportunity for a comparative approach to MBA courses, and facilitate depth in a discipline desired by some students.

In March, 2001, approximately 18 finance graduate students traveled to London to visit various financial markets, attend lectures, and meet representatives of many international financial and financial services firms. The interesting aspect of this seminar was that there was no academic credit attached to this seminar. The motivation was the sheer interest in expanding their perspective, exposure, and understanding of finance. Maybe, we have entered a new and different millennium!!

As faculty members become more experienced with international student seminars, understand the global dimensions of their respective disciplines, and reap the benefit of this type of pedagogy, more imaginative models will be used. Then, we will become more adept in meeting the challenge of preparing our students for the world they face.